KEY HIDING DEVICE

Related Applications

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/442,614, filed January 23, 2003, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates generally to devices for hiding keys and other small items, and more particularly, to a device for hiding keys and small items outdoors.

Description of the Related Art

[0003] It is a common practice for many to hide a spare key outside of their dwelling in a readily accessible place in the event that the keys they normally carry are misplaced or lost. For example, a common place for hiding spare keys is under the doormat or on top of the door ledge. However, this practice is often discouraged because burglars usually search under the doormat or on top of the door ledge for hidden spare keys when attempting to break into a home.

[0004] Various devices have been developed for hiding spare keys in less conspicuous places around the dwelling. For example, small magnetic boxes configured to hold spare keys have been designed to attach to the metal frame of the house. Key hiding receptacles that resemble the shape of rocks or bird nests have also been created. However, one of the drawbacks of these conventional key hiding devices is that they are commonly sold in the market place and prominently displayed in catalogues, commercials, or store shelves. As such, a large number of people, including would-be burglars, have become familiar with the configurations of these devices and can readily identify them when they are in use outdoors. Consequently, many of the commercially available key hiding devices have lost their effectiveness.

[0005] Hence from the foregoing, it will be appreciated that there is a need for an effective device for hiding keys outdoors. To this end, there is a particular need for a key

hiding device that cannot be easily recognized as a key hiding device even if the configuration of the device is generally known.

Summary of the Invention

[0006] In one aspect, the preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a device for hiding keys or other small items outdoors. The device comprises a housing having a base and a sidewall extending upwardly from the base to define a cavity therein. The cavity is configured for storing keys and other items. The device further includes a cap detachably engaged with the housing, wherein the cap is configured to substantially resemble a sprinkler cap. In one embodiment, an upper surface of the cap comprises features and markings that are present on a sprinkler cap. In another embodiment, the cap comprises a conventional sprinkler cap. In yet another embodiment, the cap has a diameter of about 2 inches. Preferably, the housing is substantially cylindrical and the cap engages with the housing via a set of interengaging threads. In some embodiments, the device further comprises an anchor that extends downwardly from the base and adapted to anchor the device in soil.

[0007] In another aspect, the preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a key hiding device that comprises a compartment for hiding keys and a façade that resembles at least a portion of a pop-up sprinkler. In one embodiment, the façade resembles a pop-up sprinkler cap. Preferably, the façade of the upper portion of the device resembles an upper portion of a pop-up sprinkler. In another embodiment, the compartment preferably resembles a pop-up sprinkler housing.

[0008] In yet another aspect, the preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a method of forming a key hiding device. The method comprises providing a conventional pop-up sprinkler having a cap and a housing, removing the cap from the housing, and removing sprinkler parts from inside the housing so as form a cavity therein adapted to receive a key. In one embodiment, the stem inside the housing is removed. In another embodiment, the method further comprises re-attaching the cap to the housing and affixing the device to the ground with the cap disposed substantially flush with the upper surface of the ground. Preferably, the device is positioned adjacent to a plurality of other conventional pop-up sprinklers, such as in the front yard of a dwelling. In yet another

embodiment, a plurality of devices are positioned in the ground such that the devices are spaced apart in a similar manner as conventional pop-up sprinklers.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0009] FIGURE 1 is a schematic illustration of a key hiding device of one preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[0010] FIGURE 2 is a schematic illustration of the manner in which a key or other items can be placed in and removed from the device of FIGURE 1;

[0011] FIGURE 3 is a schematic illustration of the manner the key hiding device of FIGURE 1 is installed in the ground;

[0012] FIGURE 4 is a schematic illustration of the key hiding device of FIGURE 1 installed adjacent a dwelling.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

[0013] Reference will now be made to the drawings wherein like numerals refer to like parts throughout. As will be described in greater detail below, the preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a key hiding device that is very difficult for potential burglars and thieves to identify and locate even if the configuration of the device becomes generally known.

[0014] Figure 1 provides a schematic illustration of a key hiding device 100 of one embodiment of the present invention. As shown in Figure 1, the key hiding device 100 is configured to resemble a pop-up sprinkler commonly used in an irrigation system to water lawns. The device 100 generally comprises a housing 102 and an annular cap 104 that is detachably secured to the housing 102 by an interengaging set of threads. In one embodiment, the housing 102 has a base 106 and a substantially cylindrical sidewall 108 extending upwardly from the base 106 to define a cavity 110 therein. As Figure 1 further shows, a key 106 or other small item can be stored and hidden inside the cavity 110 of the housing. In another embodiment, the housing 102 further comprises an anchor 112 extending downwardly from the base 106. The anchor 112, preferably made of metal, is adapted to facilitate planting the housing 102 in soil in a manner to be described in greater detail below.

[0015] As Figure 1 further shows, the housing 102 and annular cap 104 can be made of a wide variety of materials, such as lightweight molded plastic or the like. In one embodiment, the key hiding device 100 can be constructed from a conventional, commercially available pop-up sprinkler. The commercially available sprinkler can be modified so parts such as the pop-up stem that is typically positioned inside the sprinkler housing are removed. Preferably, substantially all parts inside the sprinkler housing are removed so as to form an interior space adapted for storing keys and other small items. In other embodiments, the key hiding device 100 can be constructed by a conventional molding process in which the parts are formed via an injection molding process or the like.

[0016] As shown in Figure 2, to access the hidden key 110 or other items placed in the device, the cap 104 is unscrewed from the housing 104 so as to expose an upper opening 114 of the housing 104 from which the key 110 or other items can be retrieved. It will be appreciated that the cap and housing are not limited to the configurations shown and described herein. In particular, the housing can comprise a variety of other sizes and shapes, including those that are not typically used for pop-up sprinklers. Moreover, the cap can resemble a number of different sprinkler cap configurations.

[0017] Figure 3 shows the manner in which the key hiding device 100 of one preferred embodiment is installed for use. As shown in Figure 3, the key hiding device 100 is installed underground in a manner such that the annular cap 104 is disposed substantially flush with the surface of the soil 200. As shown in Figure 3, the cap 104 has a façade that resembles a sprinkler cap 204 used for conventional pop-up sprinklers 206. For example, the upper surface 105 of the cap 104 can comprise features 107, 109 that resemble the upper surface 205 of a typical spray nozzle 207 and/or markings 209 found on a typical sprinkler cap. When the device 100 is installed in the ground, the upper surface 105 of the annular cap 104 is exposed to view and appears substantially identical to a typical sprinkler cap. Thus, potential burglars and other perpetrators are unable to quickly determine which of the many substantially identical sprinkler caps is the actual key hiding device.

[0018] Figure 4 is a schematic illustration of the manner in which the key hiding device 100 can be installed outdoors adjacent to a dwelling 400. As Figure 4 shows, the device 100 can be inconspicuously installed in the front yard of the dwelling amongst a

plurality of other similar looking sprinkler caps 402. In certain embodiments, more than one of the devices can be installed in the front yard such that the devices are spaced apart in a similar manner as a conventional pop-up sprinkler system. The sheer number of identical sprinkler caps typically installed in a lawn makes it very difficult if not impossible for a potential intruder to make a quick determination as to which of the sprinkler caps is actually a key hiding device even if the intruder is aware of sprinkler shaped key hiding devices. The quick identification cannot be made because of the façade of the key hiding device is substantially identical to a large number of similar devices that are spread out across a lawn.

[0019] Although the foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the present invention has shown, described and pointed out the fundamental novel features of the invention, it will be understood that various omissions, substitutions, and changes in the form of the detail of the apparatus as illustrated as well as the uses thereof may be made by those skilled in the art, without departing from the spirit of the invention.